

REMARKS

Claims 1-9 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 2 and 7 are amended. The amendments introduce no new matter because they are made to clarify the subject matter recited in the claims or to correct informalities. Reconsideration of the application based on the above amendments and the following remarks is respectfully requested.

The Office Action, on page 2, rejects claim 2 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. Claim 2 is amended to obviate the objection. Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claim 2 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, are respectfully requested.

The Office Action, on page 2, rejects claims 1-9 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,825,198 to Rolker et al. (hereinafter "Rolker") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,167,749 B1 to Yanagisawa et al. (hereinafter "Yanagisawa"). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Independent claim 1 recites, among other features, a plurality of pressure monitoring devices with different pressure ranges that monitor a pressure in said fuel gas supply channel between said main valve and said shutdown valve; the depressurization treatment device that depressurizes the inside of said fuel gas supply channel; and a determination device that monitors a variation of pressure in a sealed space of said fuel gas supply channel formed between said main valve and said shutdown valve after said main valve and said shutdown valve have been closed and determines an operation state of said main valve based on the variation of pressure in said sealed space, wherein in said depressurization treatment, said fuel gas supply channel is depressurized until the pressure enters a pressure range in which the pressure can be monitored in said plurality of pressure monitoring devices. Claims 7 and 8 recite similar features.

Rolker teaches a method of, and apparatus for, testing the tightness of two valves arranged in a fluid line by measuring a pressure condition in the line portion between two valves with both valves being closed at different times (Abstract). The Office Action concedes that Rolker does not disclose a depressurization treatment device, as is recited in the pending claims. The Office Action also concedes that Rolker only discloses a single pressure monitoring device. The Office Action relies on Yanagisawa for overcoming the conceded shortfalls in the application of Rolker to the subject matter of the pending claims.

Yanagisawa teaches a method and apparatus for automatically detecting gas leaks from a valve on a gas-containing vessel, or the like, based on detected absolute pressure and pressure fluctuation (Abstract). With reference to col. 1, lines 41-50 of Yanagisawa, the Office Action asserts that the teachings of that reference regarding detecting a gas leak in which an airtight area in communication with a valve to be tested is evacuated and pressure readings are subsequently taken is considered, by the Examiner, to correspond to the features positively recited in the pending claims which the Office Action concedes that Rolker does not teach. Additionally, with reference to col. 3, lines 37-49, the Office Action relies upon Yanagisawa's disclosure of the use of multiple pressure gauges to measure the pressure at different points as allegedly corresponding to other features recited in the pending claims which the Office Action concedes that Rolker does not teach. The analysis of the Office Action fails for at least the following reason.

First, there is nothing in Yanagisawa to suggest a plurality of pressure monitoring devices with different pressure ranges. Simply because Yanagisawa teaches use of multiple pressure gauges to measure the pressure at different points, there is no suggestion that the pressure gauges would have different pressure ranges. The conclusory assertion that "[s]ince the pressure can fluctuate, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of invention to use more than a single pressure gauge, with different ranges, in the

system to account for higher or lower pressure ranges than average" is simply not supported by any disclosure in either of the Rolker or Yanagisawa references. This conclusion calls for a conclusion that can, in reality, only be arrived at through the application of hindsight reasoning based on the roadmap provided by Applicant's disclosure.

Second, the fact that Yanagisawa discloses evacuating an airtight area in communication with a valve to be tested does not imply that the fuel gas supply channel is depressurized until the pressure enters a pressure range in which the pressure can be monitored in the plurality of pressure monitoring devices. The Office Action cites a portion of Yanagisawa that merely discloses the use of a pressure gauge which can endure the maximum pressure of a gas provided from a source gas level. It is unreasonable to expand this disclosure of Yanagisawa, in the manner suggested by the Office Action, to cover a plurality of monitoring devices, with different ranges, and depressurization treatment occurring to depressurize a fuel gas supply channel until the pressure enters a pressure range in which the pressure can be monitored in said plurality of pressure monitoring devices.

Third, the strained approach that the Office Action must take in attempting to render obvious the subject matter of the pending claims is further demonstrated in the statement on page 2. After the discussion of multiple pressure gauges with multiple ranges, the Office Action asserts obviousness in "allow[ing] for greater precision in the system since using smaller, more accurate ranges to determine even the slightest leaks in the valves" being apparently preferable. This is a conclusion drawn directly from Applicant's disclosure and not suggested, in any way, by either of the applied references.

In summary, the depressurization treatment device recited in the pending claims "knows" of appropriate pressure ranges for each of the plurality of pressure monitoring devices and controls, by depressurizing the fuel gas supply channel, the pressure until it enters the range in which the pressure can be monitored in the pressure monitoring devices. Neither

of Rolker nor Yanagisawa discloses any structure that can reasonably be considered to correspond to such positively recited features as in the pending claims.

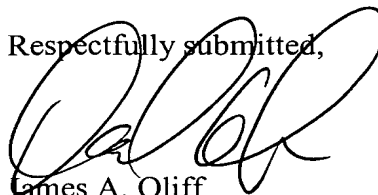
For at least the foregoing reasons, any permissible combination of Yanagisawa with Rolker cannot reasonably be considered to have suggested the combinations of all of the features positively recited in independent claims 1, 7 and 8. Further, claims 2-6 and 9 also would not have been suggested by this combination of applied references for at least the respective dependence of these claims on allowable base claims, as well as for the separately patentable subject matter that each of these claims recites.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1-9 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Rolker in view of Yanagisawa are respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submits that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims 1-9 are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicant's undersigned representative at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



James A. Oliff

Registration No. 27,075

Daniel A. Tanner, III

Registration No. 54,734

JAO:DAT/mcp

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OLIFF & BERRIDGE, PLC
P.O. Box 320850
Alexandria, Virginia 22320-4850
Telephone: (703) 836-6400

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